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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 000500

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/C

STATE ALSO FOR S/USSES

NSC FOR GAVIN

LONDON FOR POL - LORD

PARIS FOR POL -- BAIN AND KANEDA

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PREF PHUM CD CT

SUBJECT: CHADIAN ELECTORAL PROCESS: FRANCOPHONIE PUSHES
FOR BETTER IC ORGANIZATION

REF: A. NDJAMENA 152

- 1B. NDJAMENA 318
- 1C. NDJAMENA 458
- 1D. NDJAMENA 441
- 1E. NDJAMENA 410

11. (SBU) The representative to Chad of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Hacen Lebatt, called on Ambassador Nigro October 30 to express concern that technical matters including the question of whether to hold a biometric census risked setting back Chad's electoral timetable.

Lebatt, whose organization played an important and positive role in resolving earlier disagreements between the Chadian government and opposition over electoral preparations (Ref A-B), advised Ambassador that the biometric census issue did not seem to have been put to rest by President Deby's announcement in Paris October 20 that legislative elections would go forward in 2010 and presidential elections in 2011 without resort to biometrics. Labatt pointed out that the August 13 Accords seemed to call for a biometric census, and that some opposition figures including Saleh Kebzabo had noted this, calling Deby's pronouncement extra-legal.

12. (SBU) According to Lebatt, who has been consulting informally with members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and Electoral Reform Committee (Comite de suivi; ERC) over the past week, some in the Deby government had concluded that a biometric census might indeed be necessary, and so were currently focused on how to do one as quickly and inexpensively as possible. Others were hoping to rule out biometrics on grounds of cost, considering Chad's current IFI-stipulated budgetary strictures. Even a relatively simple biometric census might take two and a half years, which meant that those in the Deby administration eager to press on with elections were looking for a way out, whereas those -- including a number of prominent opposition figures -- interested in holding off on a vote that President Deby looked likely to win were calling for biometrics. The CENI was now divided over the issue, said Lebatt, although the "electoral climate" on the ERC was relatively calm, as that entity pursued its civics education projects in the countryside.

13. (SBU) Should the Deby administration conclude that it would have to undertake some sort of a biometric census, continued Lebatt, the soonest that legislative elections could occur would be mid-2011, right up against the constitutionally-mandated timing for the presidential vote in August 2011. Deby of course hoped for a separation between

the two contests, so that he could use the results of the first to establish a strategy for the second.

¶4. (SBU) Meanwhile, both the CENI and ERC were consumed with their own financial troubles. Neither body had the sort of budget or physical plant that it thought it deserved, and neither was familiar with procedures for international grant-seeking, Lebatt lamented.

¶5. (SBU) Lebatt said he had concluded that representatives of the international community, consisting of the UNDP ResRep Falavigna and Ambassadors with observer seats on the ERC, should get together as a group to consider how to offer assistance so that the electoral process would not bog down. The first meeting would be hosted by the French Embassy on November 2. He pointed out that the OIE was committed to consensus, and that points on which he thought there was currently consensus among members of the CENI and ERC included that renewed threats of electoral boycotts would be undesirable, as would dismissal or resignation of current members of the two bodies.

¶6. (SBU) Lebatt said that some fixed circumstances -- such as constitutional provisions about electoral timing -- would have to be accepted as such. Other seeming blockages might be resolvable through training or mediation. Some processes (e.g., the activities of the CENI and ERC) could go along simultaneously, if disagreements persisted on which had authority for what, or how to sequence respective projects. Basically, the international community needed to work quickly and well if elections were to take place in 2010 and 2011.

¶7. (SBU) Ambassador Nigro stressed that the U.S. sought credible, as opposed to perfect, elections -- the legislative and municipal contests in 2010 and the presidential vote in 2011. We wanted to avoid biometrics altogether, or if that were not possible, to pursue the

NDJAMENA 00000500 002 OF 002

simplest approach to a biometric census. We agreed that the international community needed to speak with one voice so as not to exacerbate divisions within the Chadian body politic.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) We support the Francophonie initiative to increase international coordination on Chad's electoral process. Questions we hope to address at the November 2 meeting include whether and how to support the CENI and ERC, including financially; how to use our observer seat on the ERC most effectively, assuming that the body has reasons to continue to operate; what sort of public and/or behind-the-scenes strategy to pursue with respect to debate on the biometric census; whether and how to weigh in publicly and privately on electoral timing; how the IC can reach out in an organized fashion to the opposition and dissidents; how the IC can better help with public education prior to elections; and how the IC can help create a climate of free and fair debate in advance of elections, so as to encourage a free and fair vote as well. It is worth noting that Lebatt's current academic interest -- he is a political scientist with considerable knowledge of Middle Eastern and African political systems -- is power-sharing, which he believes offers untried opportunities in both Africa and the Middle East.

NIGRO